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FEDERAL AID TO EDUCATION: IS IT ENOUGH?

BY

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<p>In under thirty years, the United States has gone from a position of pre-eminence in education worldwide to a position well to the rear of the pack among the industrialized countries. This is due to a number of factors including the failure of our schools to keep up with advancing technology, the lowering of educational standards, and drug and alcohol abuse in our schools, among others. But the single biggest reason has been the limiting of educational access by reduction in general funding at the federal level. The decade of the 80s saw the percentage of the federal budget allocated to education go from 2.3 percent to 1.7 percent and as a result the public school student lost access to quality educational opportunities across the board. This was compounded by state and local governments being</p>			
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beset by the same economic and political constraints as the federal government. In 1989, President Bush held an education summit with the nation's governors to set goals and objectives and to propose solutions to the education problems in the country. There was, however, no defined path as to how to achieve these goals and objectives. More importantly, no established strategy has been set forth by the administration or Congress for fully restoring the federal share of support for public education. Until that occurs, we will continue to face the educational deficit that faces us now.

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FEDERAL AID TO EDUCATION: IS IT ENOUGH?

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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In under thirty years, the United States has gone from a position of pre-eminence in education worldwide to a position well to the rear of the pack among the industrialized countries. This is due to a number of factors including the failure of our schools to keep up with advancing technology, the lowering of educational standards, and drug and alcohol abuse in our schools, among others. But the single biggest reason has been the limiting of educational access by reduction in general funding at the federal level. The decade of the 80s saw the percentage of the federal budget allocated to education go from 2.3 percent to 1.7 percent and as a result the public school student lost access to quality educational opportunities across the board. This was compounded by state and local governments being beset by the same economic and political constraints as the federal government. In 1989, President Bush held an education summit with the nation's governors to set goals and objectives and to propose solutions to the education problems in the country. There was, however, no defined path as to how to achieve these goals and objectives. More importantly, no established strategy has been set forth by the administration or Congress for fully restoring the federal share of support for public education. Until that occurs, we will continue to face the educational deficit that faces us now.

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INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of this century, Congress, federal agencies, and federal courts have made a significant positive impact on the quality of education for public school students while maintaining sensitivity to the desire for local autonomy in decisions about education.

Over the past decade, however, the federal education effort has moved in the opposite direction: from diversity toward consolidation; from leadership by example toward leadership by urgent appeal; from expanding opportunity toward limiting access by reducing funding.

Research shows that the design of federal education programs is effective and their purposes noble. But without adequate resources, programs such as compensatory education for disadvantaged students, handicapped education programs, and postsecondary student aid are unable to accomplish their goals.

This paper will attempt to define the educational dilemma in this country by looking at the results of federally funded educational programs over the past decade and the severe impact limited funding has had on them. It will further show that without establishing a strategy for fully restoring the federal share of support for public education, the educational problems now prevalent in America will only continue to increase.

DEFINING THE NATION'S EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM

In 1981, T. H. Bell, the Secretary of Education, created the National Commission on Excellence in Education and charged them with conducting a study on the state of our educational system in America. The result of their study was a report to the American people entitled "A Nation At Risk" and it brought to light publicly what many had feared privately for many years.... "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation was being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.... What was unimaginable a generation ago had begun to occur -- others were matching and surpassing our educational attainments."¹ The evidence was all too clear. As an example, in early 1960 the first International Mathematics Study was conducted and resulted in the upper 5 per cent of U. S. math students being rated comparable to the upper 5 per cent of math students worldwide. A follow on evaluation by the same study group was conducted during the 81-82 school year using 8th and 12th graders and this time the upper 5 per cent of U. S. students finished in the bottom quartile worldwide in average math scores. Even more alarming was the fact that the U. S. 12th graders scored close to the bottom.² Equally as shocking are recent 9th grade science achievement test results ranking the U. S. seventh out of seven industrialized countries based on an International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement study.

What has caused the U. S. to plummet from being competitive in education worldwide in the early 60's to the rear of the pack in the early 90's? There are many theories, but one put forth by Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, whose organization represents one-fifth of the nation's teaching population, seems to have some merit. He states that our system of elementary and secondary education evolved with an economy based on mass production. The emphasis was on developing routinized work skills for routine work. Due to advancing technology, the economy has moved away from mass production mentality to an economy requiring a work force more capable of independent, creative thought. Our elementary and secondary schools have simply not kept pace with the changes. Additionally, Shanker feels the bureaucratization and rigidity in our education system penalizes both teacher and student alike. Students are required to learn the same thing, at the same speed, in the same way and teachers are required to teach all day, without adequate preparation time, in classes that are overcrowded, denying the student needed individual attention. He goes on to say that disadvantaged children's educational funding in the 60's raised that group to a functional level, in part due to a lowering of educational standards. Unfortunately this was at the expense of upper level students who, because of not being properly challenged, began to suffer academically, particularly in math, science and foreign languages.³

Cultural changes in our country over the last two decades have also had a decidedly negative impact on educational achievement, specifically due to drug and alcohol abuse among school age children and a lack of proper parental interest in their children's education.

Further compounding this educational dilemma is the need for teacher educational reform. Recent interviews with college students interested in entering the teaching profession showed the majority in the bottom quarter academically of the total college population. Additionally, roughly half the teaching population will be retirement eligible in the next five years requiring 23 per cent of all college graduates over the next several years to enter teaching to fill the void. To make teaching more attractive to the better student, some form of redefinition of teacher roles and school restructuring must occur to avoid having to recruit teachers from only the lower half of college classes.⁴

Although Congress, federal agencies and the courts have had a positive impact overall on the quality of education in the public schools over the latter half of this century, the past decade in particular has seen the federal education effort move backwards; primarily from expanding opportunity toward limiting educational access by reducing general funding. The design of federal education programs is effective, but without adequate resourcing, programs such as compensatory education for the disadvantaged student and handicapped education programs, among

others, are unable to accomplish their goals.

FEDERAL EDUCATION PROGRAM RESULTS IN THE LAST DECADE

The year 1981 marked a turning point in the growth of federal support to education in America. The Reagan administration, looking for ways to cut federal spending, attempted to dismantle the Education Department. Although Congress refused to go along because of the Department's proven effectiveness, the administration succeeded in retreating from meeting national educational needs by defunding. Congress fended off the most severe of the administration's proposed cuts, but deep reductions resulted in many areas of the education budget. As an example, the FY 88 education final appropriation was \$20.3 billion, an increase of \$6 billion over FY 80 funding and \$6.3 billion more than President Reagan proposed. When adjusted for inflation however, it was \$2.6 billion less than the cost of providing the same services in FY 80.⁵ Additionally it did not include funding for programs that did not exist in FY 80 such as the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, Math-Science Teacher Education, and Magnet Schools. Although total federal education funding has increased up through FY 90, the gap between funding and service levels has widened. The percentage of total federal resources provided for elementary and secondary education over the past decade fell from over 9 per cent in 1980 to roughly 6 per cent in 1989. Education as a share of the total federal budget fell from 2.3 per cent to 1.7 per cent between 1980 and 1989. If education

funding had remained steady as a share of the total federal budget, the Department of Education would have received some \$6 billion more to support their programs in FY 89.⁶

LIMITED PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND LIMITED FEDERAL FUNDING

Throughout the eighties education assumed a defensive posture against continuing budget cuts, inflation and the political and economic environment as a whole. Educational programs were pitted against one another for federal funding as well as against other social programs such as housing, nutrition and health care. Taking last place in the overall debate were the needs of the children and as a result, the number of eligible students served in federally funded education programs dropped dramatically over the decade of the eighties. As an example, there was a million and a half student drop from 1980 to 1989 in the number of Chapter 1 students enrolled while the number of children living in poverty increased during the same period. (Chapter 1 programs provide financial assistance to state and local educational agencies to meet special educational needs of educationally disadvantaged children, migrant children, handicapped children in state operated programs, neglected and delinquent children in state institutions and juveniles in adult correctional facilities.) These funding reductions, in many cases, affected the quality of the programs and the resulting ripple effect impacted on the total education effort in many schools.

The public school student lost access to quality educational

opportunities across the board during the eighties. In terms of spending power, virtually all major federal education programs lost significant resources. Between FY 80 and FY 89 Chapter 1 programs lost \$1 billion in spending power, Impact Aid \$700 million, Vocational Aid \$430 million, Adult Education \$37 million, and Bilingual Education \$146 million.⁷ Compounding the loss of spending power against inflation in federal education is the fact that many of the programs are severely underfunded considering the number of eligible students. Chapter 1 funding in FY 89 served only 47 per cent of the eligible students. This does not even take into account up to a million disadvantaged students that were reported by the census.

The level of federal support to mentally and physically handicapped students has sharply decreased over the eighties as well while the overall student enrollment under the Education of All Handicapped Act has increased.

Present bilingual education programs cover less than one-sixth of the total eligible reported by the states which is some 3.1 million less than the last census indicates.

Head Start, which is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, is the largest and oldest federal program and is designed to help pre-school aged children get a successful start in school by providing them with comprehensive educational, medical, nutritional and social services. Although the program has been a stated priority by politicians from the

local through the federal level, FY 89 federal funding served only 16 per cent of those eligible to participate. In considering these selected programs the unmet needs are staggering: \$2.3 billion in Chapter 1 programs, \$1 billion in bilingual education, \$6.5 billion in handicapped education, and \$6.3 billion in Head Start, for a total of \$16.1 billion.⁸

NATIONAL EDUCATION PRIORITIES

The sharp reduction in federal commitment to education has forced the state and local governments to attempt to make up the difference while being urged at the same time to set higher standards and increase the quality of educational programs. Local and state governments, as a result, are paying only lip service to education as a national priority and the products our schools are turning out are the outcome.

There are a number of societal factors affecting national educational priorities including changes in societal behavior, changes in congressional leadership and changes in public opinion, to mention just a few. In the 1960's and 1970's these priorities were emphasized primarily by the education community. Now, the focus on these priorities comes from business leaders distressed about our educational product as members of the labor force. More and more they are finding that our educational system is not preparing our young people to keep pace with the dynamic, technological changes occurring in today's highly competi-

tive business world. A recent Committee for Economic Development report indicates that "if present trends in education continue, the scarcity of well-educated, well qualified people in the work force will seriously damage this country's competitive position in an increasingly challenging global marketplace. Our industries will be unable to grow and compete internationally because a growing educational underclass will lack the necessary skills and work habits to function productively on the job."⁹

Education reform in the form of high academic standards and a greater emphasis on analysis and problem solving will not succeed when schools and communities can't establish and maintain programs to help all students meet those standards. The problem is that state and local governments are beset by the same economic and political constraints as the federal government. The only answer is to establish a strategy for fully restoring the federal share of support for public education.

THE EDUCATIONAL SUMMIT

In September of 1989, President Bush met with the nation's governors in a first ever educational summit designed to face up to and propose solutions to the educational deficit. Four primary agreements evolved from the meeting: 1) to establish a process for setting national educational goals; 2) to seek greater flexibility and enhanced accountability in the use of federal resources to meet the goals; 3) to undertake a major state-by-state effort to restructure the education system; and 4) to re-

port annually on progress in achieving the goals. Subject to state legislative approval, the following were offered for consideration as national goals: the readiness of children to start school; the performance of students on international achievement tests, especially in math and science; the reduction of the drop-out rate and academic performance improvement particularly among at-risk students; the functional literacy of adult Americans; the level of training necessary to guarantee a competitive work force; the supply of qualified teachers and up-to-date technology; and the establishment of safe, disciplined drug free schools.¹⁰

The goals and objectives laid out by the President and the governors at the educational summit are undoubtedly the direction this country needs to go over the next decade and beyond to solve its educational deficit. The consensus is, however, that there has been no defined path outlined as to how to achieve these goals and objectives. Until that is accomplished, the educational summit will only be seen as so much rhetoric.

THE FY 91 BUDGET AND AMERICA'S EDUCATIONAL FUTURE

Given the unfunded educational requirements already mentioned in this paper, the increase in federal educational funding proposed by President Bush in his FY 91 budget did not come near balancing with the list of goals and objectives submitted as a result of the educational summit. The Senate, feeling somewhat

the same way, added programs of its own to the President's budget proposal in its Excellence in Education Act and provided a \$578 million increase over FY 90 funding (which passed). The Senate bill provided for the following: \$200 million for the creation of Presidential Merit Schools, schools that show outstanding success in serving the poor; an additional \$175 million in higher education assistance for the needy; \$50 million for schools of excellence in a single subject area, like science or art; an additional \$25 million to expand current programs to combat drop-out rates; \$25 million for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to create rigorous teacher assessments through research and development; \$25 million for teacher training in middle schools; and \$230 million to increase endowments to historically black colleges.¹¹ The administration supported the Senate version with only minor changes.

The House of Representatives, specifically the Education Subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee, set aside the President's budget proposal and proposed a \$5.7 billion increase in federal education funding. The House bill, the Equity and Excellence in Education Act, was based on the premise that excellence in education could be achieved through increased funding of existing programs such as Head Start, Chapter 1, and handicapped education programs. The House Democrats' bill proposed an additional \$1 billion each to Chapter 1 programs and higher education (Pell Grants). Their proposal also provided an

additional \$1 billion to Head Start; an additional \$252 million to supplemental food programs; \$75 million more for school drop-out prevention; \$150 million for establishing Presidential Merit Schools; \$184 million to expand the Eisenhower Math and Science Act; an additional \$400 million to adult literacy programs; \$35 million additional funding to drug free schools and student safety programs; and \$379 million to teacher recruiting and retention programs.¹²

Educational organizations throughout the country were hopeful the relaxation of East-West tensions might produce some sort of "peace dividend" which could, in part, be applied toward increased federal support for education programs. As it turned out, the Gulf crisis and its associated costs, coupled with an already staggering budget deficit fueled by the Savings and Loan bailout, forced the Congress to ultimately pass an education budget of 27 billion dollars. This represented a relatively modest 2.5 billion dollar increase over the previous year's education budget when the increase was bounced against the unmet needs mentioned earlier in this paper.

The FY 92 budget proposed by President Bush proposed another 2.5 billion dollar increase over the present educational budget, but with the cost of funding the recently ended war in the Gulf and the continuing budget deficit, one has to wonder how the educational programs discussed in this paper will fare when educational need is compared with economic reality. My assessment

is not very well. It will take more than money to solve America's educational problems, but without money, and more than is being allocated to education now, the goals established at the educational summit are meaningless. Excellence in education costs, but mediocrity will cost this country far more in the long run.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The intent of this paper has been to show how the lack of adequate federal funding has negatively impacted on the state of education in America today and to further show that without substantial increases in federal outlays to education, the situation will only continue to deteriorate. This is not to say that lack of federal funding is the only educational problem, for that is certainly not the case. For without parental involvement, increased student motivation, and innovative state and local school system reform, all the money in the world will not solve our educational woes. The burden rests with the American public to communicate with our nation's leaders at the local, state, and federal level and demand that education be paid more than the lip service it is receiving now.

Notes

¹Hoffman, Ellen. "The Education Deficit." National Journal, 14 Mar 1987: 618.

²Hoffman, 618.

³Hoffman, 619.

⁴Hoffman, 621.

⁵Unknown Author of "Federal Education Funding: Present Realities and Future Needs." National Education Association Publication, Apr 1989: 1.

⁶Unknown Author of "Federal Education Funding, etc." 1.

⁷Unknown Author of "Federal Education Funding, etc." 3.

⁸Unknown Author of "Federal Education Funding, etc." 4.

⁹Unknown Author of "Federal Education Funding, etc." 4.

¹⁰The Budget for Fiscal Year 1991. U. S. Government Printing Office Document, Jan. 1991: 96.

¹¹Tolchin, Martin. "In U. S. School Spending, Question Is How Much?" New York Times, 4 Apr 1990: B-7.

¹²Tolchin, B-8.

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